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SUBJECT: MEDIA REACTION: U.S.-CHINA-TAIWAN RELATIONS

¶1. Summary: Taiwan's major Chinese-language dailies gave extensive coverage August 21 to a China Airlines Boeing 737-800 airliner, which burst into flames shortly after landing at Okinawa's Naha international airport Monday. Coverage also focused on the surge of Taiwan's stock price index Monday; on the strong backlash from local pig farmers over the Taiwan government's controversial decision on the use of ractopamine in pork; and on the 2008 presidential election.

¶2. In terms of editorials and commentaries, an editorial in the centrist, KMT-leaning "China Times" criticized the Taiwan government's policy-making process with regard to the use of ractopamine in pork. An editorial in the pro-independence "Liberty Times" urged the United States to establish formal and comprehensive diplomatic relations with Taiwan, citing former U.S. ambassador to the UN John Bolton's strong support for Taiwan and its UN bid. An op-ed in the pro-independence, English-language "Taipei Times" discussed Taiwan's UN bid and said "the United States wants Taiwan to take a step back to maintain the 'status quo.'" End summary.

A) "Why Don't [Taiwan's] Officials Set an Example by Eating U.S. Pork?"

The centrist, KMT-leaning "China Times" [circulation: 400,000] editorialized (8/20):

"... The latest thought [on the use of ractopamine in pork] was: The use of ractopamine will be banned among local pig farmers but allowed for imported pork; namely, U.S. pork containing the feed additive is allowed to be imported to Taiwan, while the use of such substance remains banned on the island. This decision is very thought-provoking. First, it is a policy tailor-made exactly for the U.S. pork. Didn't someone say previously that there was no pressure from the United States? How come then a decision that is favorable for the U.S. pork containing ractopamine has been deliberately adopted while such a feed additive is 'banned locally'? Besides, [such a decision] has yet opened a new market for ractopamine. ...

"It is originally a very simple policy decision as to whether ractopamine should be banned -- it should be banned as long as it is harmful [to the people's health] and allowed to be used as long as it is harmless. But even such a simple policy decision could be manipulated by the government policy decision makers, who found it difficult to resist the U.S. pressure on the one hand and reluctant to lose the votes of the local pig farmers on the other, into such an outrageous and ridiculous conclusion whereby the ban on ractopamine is lifted for U.S. pork but not Taiwan's. Here is a suggestion: If those officials who believe that U.S. pork is harmless, why don't they set an example for the Taiwan people by eating U.S. pork for three months!"

B) "The United States Should Establish Comprehensive Formal Diplomatic Relations with Taiwan"

The pro-independence "Liberty Times" [circulation: 720,000] editorialized (8/18):

"... Despite all that, given Taiwan's democratic reforms and transfer of political powers, the island's mainstream public opinion has already taken shape. All that the Taiwan people desire now is to maintain the status quo of Taiwan being an independent sovereign state. The situation stated in the 'Shanghai Communiqué' that 'All Chinese on either side of the Taiwan Strait maintain there is but one China' was in reality one in which one side [of the Taiwan Strait] was ruled by Chiang Kai-shek while the other side by Mao Tse-tung -- neither had anything to do with Taiwan. As a result,

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the United States should naturally build upon such reality and acknowledge that Taiwan is an independent sovereign state.

"Given the increasingly complicated interactions in the international community over the recent years, the United States has been constantly restrained by China when it comes to the cross-Strait issue. The crux [of this problem] lies in the fact that the United States has been adopting an ambiguous position with regard to Taiwan's status as a sovereign state, and that it has failed to puncture China's fictitious story and has thus made China increasingly insatiable. Let's just imagine if, just as [former U.S. ambassador to the UN] John Bolton advocated, the United States establishes comprehensive and formal diplomatic ties with Taiwan and Taiwan becomes a formal member of the UN, what position will Beijing be in to allege that Taiwan is part of China? How daring will China be to do all the saber-rattling against Taiwan? Will it not be possible that the tension across the Taiwan Strait will be totally removed? ..."

C) "Proposal, True or Not, Puts US in a Tough Spot"

Emerson Chang, director of the Department of International Studies

at Nanhua University, opined in the pro-independence, English-language "Taipei Times" [circulation: 30,000] (8/20):

"According to US media reports, China may try to solve the Taiwan issue by asking the UN General Assembly to decide on the question of Taiwan's sovereignty, an issue not dealt with in UN Resolution 2758.

President Chen Shui-bian has suddenly decided not to request permission to transit through the US, clearly in hopes that Washington will attempt to stop China's proposal. This may be an overestimate of US influence in the UN. It is also difficult to decide whether the reports are true, and we cannot rule out a US attempt to control Taiwan through the UN in order to make up for China's failed attempt to control it through Washington. ...

"The fact that US media suddenly reported that the US government is worried China will submit a proposal to the General Assembly stating that Taiwan is part of the PRC, while a hesitant US is unwilling to accept Ban's decision and to clarify where it stands, raises three questions: Who leaked the news? To what purpose? Will it actually happen? Taiwan tends to believe that the US has found out about China's plan, but by not trying to find the underlying reason, the US will risk hurting cross-strait relations, risk forcing Taiwan independence, risk provoking hostility toward the US and risk admitting that Taiwan's sovereignty remains unresolved. Other issues may also arise due to attempts to change the 'status quo.' ... Regardless of whether the reports are true or made up by the US, the US wants Taiwan to take a step back to maintain the 'status quo.' If Taipei won't compromise and China decides to move ahead, the US -- although willing to help Taiwan -- may not be able to guarantee that the decision will be beneficial to Taiwan."

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